

LONDON NIGHT

Rodker, John, 1894-1955

In the Strand

*Desperately and disdainfully showed his wares. . . .
Stupid things . . . laces, studs. . . .
I bought . . . his look . . . and . . . this verse.*

Introduction

Still the void turns
And creaks,
And spatters me
With spume of gaunt fatuity. . .
And again turns
Unceasingly
Till the quiet burns.

The night is full, with laughter in its wings,
And faint wan faces ouched in yearning sky,
Laughter that weals the face of night
And stings. The anguished soul drifts by.

I will not go. . .

Still the void turns. . .
And sickening thuds. . .
Creaking.
Still the quiet burns. . .
With flame that floods
The secret inner sky,
And yearns to the sound
And the laughter.

I am called,
Hesitant.
Still the void turns.

In the bus

Hum of the town !
Splashes of faces
In garish places
Drive ever down.

In the park

The gaunt trees grope to the night
The distant magic. . .
They touch the sky.
The faces linger to the light,
And endlessly drift by,
With shuffle of far feet,
Like leaves that strike
And flicker on the way
With little ripples of dry sound.

The band

Noise of the band . . . and the wind asleep.
Over the wind I mount on wings,
And swing and gleam and sheer and float.

How chill it is grown . . and how remote the faces. . .
And thin and very faint . . . and the wind sings. . .

Interlude

Shop girl, poor clerk—
Ephemerons . . wing your swift way.
A little love . . it will not mark
The soul unused to day.
So cold, so far away you seem,
Shop girl, poor clerk.

I am the dreamer. . . Are you the dream?

How the noise mocks me . . and the pain !

And they laugh about me . . . while the trees unheard . . .
Though not to one or three . . .
The water calls in vain.
For she is much more amorous then,
And will not prize her sweets too dear. . .
For after all we are poor men
And love we may not know;
Though here. . .

Hyde Park Corner

Stress of the crowd . . . and the whole of it mute. . .
Tunics that thrill in the light till you look at his face
With a rush of hate . . and hate for the grace
Of the slavey wooing the brute.

Stress of the crowd!

Picture Palace

Breathless. . . The giggles cease. . .
The ruddled alcove. . .
The clicking of the reel . . . peace.
Flicker . . . light.
We thrill to the rush and the clatter. . .
And spatter the night with our souls. . .
And steal the soul of the night.

The girl at the box was very sweet. . .
Manicured nails, and massaged smile, and teeth
Resplendent . . . Flicker . . . light.
The rush and the clatter,
With dust of fatuity
Spattered
Out of the void.

Always the street and the giggle of girls,
Women from where?
God, but the night must be full of them. . .

Anarchist Club

Quiet at last . . . she here. . .
The babble of hot voices strangely soothes. . .
The coffee is black. . . Avernus' waters where
The soul's disquiets flare,
And she. . . Her face is like half-old ivory,
A something past in its whiteness,
With cheeks a-hollow. . . Smoking ever she talks
And disdains me . . . quite. . .
This is not the place. . .
Later, perhaps, she'll not deny me.
And now and then some one will say,
"A bas!" . . . "Saboter!"

How came we here?

Café

The sybaritic waiter brings us drink. . .
Thick lips and mottled face. . .
And gazes at her.
I think his eyes swoon back
To ancient arcadies
In her black, secret eyes.
She is the beauty at the feast. . .

My friends and their friends flock,
With words well greased.

Oh ! but the babble wearies me
And the lights. . .
And rococo. . .

Liqueur

One lotus bud swings to the harbor of my soul
And bursts. . .
And each glad petal . . . thirsts
Unto all heaven. . . Far
Insinuating roots. . .
Wondrous fruits
Creating, becoming of all things,
And God singing!

"My moon, my almond-eyed delight goes from me
And I am old. . .
I am far older than she is. . .
And now she laughs at my gray hairs. . .
Yet may I not stretch out to chasten her lest she rebel.
I will use songs and fair words. . .
To bring her to me.
Then she shall languish forever
In the prison of my infinite mercy."

Night, speak me soft—
I have sipped but the rim of "her" cup. . .
Horror of vastness dripped
From star to star—
And even you
Gould not help me.
I am afraid.